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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study that attempted to better understand the tendency to stigmatize help-seeking among Koreans. Specific research questions investigated were: Is there a relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking among Koreans? Is there a difference in tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking after a counseling experience? and Is there a difference in tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking between a community sample (n=192) and a college student sample (n=151) in Korea? Results suggest that the higher the level of vertical individualism people exhibit, the less tolerant they are of the stigma associated with seeking psychological help. Also results show a significant inverse relationship between vertical-individualism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking in the college student sample, but no significant relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking in the community sample. There were no significant differences in the degree of tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help in the two samples. Implications of these findings for counseling are discussed. (Contains 24 references.) (MKA)

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Individualism-Collectivism and Tolerance of Stigma Associated with Help-seeking among Koreans

ED 447 367

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There is a well-known notion that Asians underutilize psychological help. Several cross-cultural researchers suggested that underuse of psychological services may be largely attributed to Asian cultural values that underlie beliefs about mental illness(i.e. Noh, Kasper, & Chen, 1998) The cultural stigma of help-seeking for mental illness has often been identified as influencing Asians' underuse of psychological help. Why does the mental illness label have such a catastrophic effect on one's life and family in Asian culture? Several cross-cultural studies in Asian culture suggested that the collectivistic feature of Asian culture is possibly related to the cultural stigma associated with mental illness(i.e. Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999). That is, in a collectivistic culture, Asians tend to believe that seeking outside help for mental illness will bring shame upon one's family. And the burden to not bring shame upon one's family may result in intense stigma feelings associated with seeking psychological help.

The present study is an attempt to better understand the tendency to stigmatize help-seeking among Koreans. Specific research questions investigated in this study are 1) Is there a relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking among Koreans? 2) Is there a difference in tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking after a counseling experience? and 3) Is there a difference in tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking between a community sample and a college student sample in Korea?

Research participants were 192 Korean community residents (Male=75, Female=117) and 151 Korean college students(Male=46, Female=105). Tolerance of stigma associated

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with help-seeking was measured by a "Stigma" subscale of the Attitudes Toward Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATPPHS: Fisher and Turner, 1970). Individualism-collectivism was measured by the scale of Individualism and Collectivism (Singelis and Triandis, et al 1995). The scale of Individualism and Collectivism is composed of four subscales: Vertical-Individualism (VI), Horizontal-Individualism (HI), Vertical-Collectivism (VC), and Horizontal-Collectivism (HC).

To examine the relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking, correlation coefficients between the four scores of VI, HI, VC, and HC, and a score measuring tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking were calculated. To examine the difference in the degree of tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help after a previous counseling experience, a t-test was performed on the degree of tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help between a group having a previous counseling experience and a group not having a previous counseling experience. To examine the difference in the degree of tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking between a community sample and a college student sample, a t-test was performed on a score measuring stigma tolerance associated with psychological help.

Regarding the relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking, the correlation coefficients between scores of VI, HI, VC, and HC and a score of the tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help suggested that the higher level of vertical individualism people show, the less tolerant they are of the stigma associated with seeking psychological help ($r=-.16$, $p<.005$). This result is contradictory to the well-known assertion that the collectivistic feature in Asian culture is responsible for Asians' stigmatization of help-seeking. Considering the qualities of vertical individualism, which is more achievement oriented than human oriented and competitive, and emphasizes status difference, this finding implies that people who

are more competitive and achievement oriented may have more fear in Korean culture of being stigmatized for getting psychological help. The relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking was examined for both the community sample and the college student sample. The results show a significant inverse relationship between vertical-individualism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking found in the college student sample ($r=-.22$, $p<.005$), but no significant relationship between individualism-collectivism and tolerance of stigma associated with help-seeking in the community sample. This finding implies that students who put emphasis on competition and achievement and are sensitive to status differences have more difficulty in tolerating stigma associated with help-seeking than the community sample.

With regards to the difference in the degree of tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help after a counseling experience, people who had a previous counseling experience were shown to be significantly more tolerant of the stigma associated with seeking psychological help than people who did not have a counseling experience. This finding could be interpreted in two ways: people got more tolerant of the stigma after having a counseling experience or people had a counseling experience because they were tolerant of the stigma associated with psychological help.

The result of the t-test on the stigma scale between the community sample and the student sample indicated that there was no significant difference in the degree of tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help between these two samples. Several cross-cultural researchers suggested that community sample who maintain more traditional Asian values may have more negative attitudes toward seeking professional help than a college student sample that is more acculturated to western values through education. However, the finding here did not support this suggestion.

From the finding of inverse relationship between vertical individualism and tolerance of stigma associated with psychological help in Korean culture, the following implication for counseling can be made. Asians who have a high level of vertical individualism and who are more status oriented and achievement oriented may fear seeking psychological help because of the stigma. For them, a professional therapist or counselor may be regarded as an authority figure, which may interfere with formulating a safe and effective working alliance. Exploring and empathizing with the Asian client's fear of being stigmatized for seeking help may help to create a meaningful therapy or counseling relationship.

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